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AUTHOR Rozsnafszky, Jane; Hendel, Darwin D.
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ABSTRACT

The present report describes the results of an evaluation study of the first course in the new Women's Studies program at the University of Minnesota and the resistance of the teaching assistants for the course to the evaluation. A hypothesis to explain this resistance is that an outside evaluator may face inherent difficulties in evaluating new social-political curricula such as women's studies because of the understandable suspiciousness of students, to which Grier and Cobbs' (1968) term "cultural paranoia" has been applied. Suggestions are offered to future evaluators of the social-political curricula that may help lessen this "paranoia." (Author)

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# "Cultural Paranoia" and Evaluation

Jane Rozsnafszky and Darwin D. Hendel

Measurement Services Center
University of Minnesota

The present report describes the results of an evaluation study of the first course in the new Women's Studies program at the University of Minnesota and the resistance of the teaching assistants for the course to the evaluation. A hypothesis to explain this resistance is that an outside evaluator may face inherent difficulties in evaluating new social-political curricula such as women's studies because of the understandable suspiciousness of students, to which Grier and Cobbs' (1968) term "cultural paranoia" has been applied. Suggestions are offered to future evaluators of the social-political curricula that may help lessen this "paranoia."

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"Cultural Paranoia" and Evaluation

Objectives

The objectives of the present report are: (1) to report the results of an evaluation study of the first Women's Studies course in the new Women's Studies program at the University of Minnesota (Rozsnafszky and Hendel, 1974); (2) to offer a hypothesis that outside evaluators may face inherent difficulties in evaluating new social-political curricula such as Women's, Afro-American, and Chicano studies. These difficulties may arise because the students and faculty in these curricula may have understandably suspicious attitudes toward outsiders, to which attitudes we have applied Grier and Cobbs' (1968) term "cultural paranoia"; and (3) to suggest what steps future researchers might consider to lessen this "cultural paranoia" in evaluation studies of new social-political curricula.

Perspectives

One of the most significant changes in higher education in recent years has been the creation of new curricula based on social-political movements like those advocating equal rights for Blacks, Chicanos, and women. Women's studies has been described in a feminist journal as having emerged out of "a living political movement" (Grahl, Kennedy, Robinson, and Simmerman, 1972), and Black and Chicano studies have similar strong political connections. Another similarity in these new social-political curricula is that their creation on individual campuses has usually been the result of persistent, militant student effort.

The experience of being a militant woman, Black, or Chicano and struggling to introduce a new program into a university may sensitize students to criticism of their efforts and lead to a resentment of outside efforts at evaluation. Students from these groups have not only endured discrimination because of their race or sex, but have had to struggle with the Establishment to win recognition for their proposed programs. It is not surprising, then, that some may develop "cultural paranoia," a term first used by Grier and Cobbs (1968) to describe the distrust of white society many Blacks develop that is necessary for their survival.

This "cultural paranoia" may be found among faculty supporters of the social-political curricula as well as among students. For example, at a 1973 conference on evaluation in women's studies held at Wesleyan University, the faculty participants expressed distrust of outside evaluation of new women's studies programs. They criticized traditional social science methods as used by outside evaluators, who may have preconceived ideas about women's studies.

In the study described here, we applied the term "cultural paranoia" to the attitude of about one-third of the 18 teaching assistants whose actions had the effect of sabotaging our evaluation of the first course in the Women's Studies program at the University of Minnesota. Our hypothesis is that a similar attitude will be understandably held by many Black, Chicano, and feminist students involved in their respective programs on campuses throughout the country. These students will tend to suspect the motives of members of white, male members of the University Establishment, especially when that Establishment presumes to evaluate a recently approved program, whose funding and future are by no means secure.

Method

At the request of the Women's Studies department, approved in August 1973, Measurement Services Center of the University of Minnesota (MSC) agreed to do a study of the first course of the new department in September 1973. The goal of this study was to estimate the impact and effectiveness of the course and to discover the backgrounds, interests, and involvement in the women's movement of these students.

In this study, three questionnaires were used. The first questionnaire, the Feminist Questionnaire, was an attitude survey composed by the teaching assistants for the course, unknown to the MSC staff, and administered on the first day of class. The authors composed two other questionnaires, Questionnaire 1, given in class at the end of the first week, and Questionnaire 2, administered in small group sessions by the teaching assistants during the last week of class. These two questionnaires requested demographic information, tapped attitudes toward the role of women, and asked students to evaluate the course.

Data Source

The three questionnaires described above were the source of data on student attitudes toward women and reaction to Women's Studies 1001. The authors' and instructor's observations of the behavior of the teaching assistants for the course provided information on "cultural paranoia."

Results and Conclusions

The results from the questionnaires revealed that the students in Wo St 1001, 97% of whom were women, were highly interested and involved in the women's

movement. Furthermore, most did not accept the traditional roles society has assigned to women. Specifically, they rejected such attitudes as the following: children are necessary for a woman's self-fulfillment, women are less decisive and more nurturing than men, a husband's career should come before his wife's, women should avoid competition, there should be a double standard of sexual morality, and the nuclear family is the best institution for rearing children. Students generally supported equalitarian marriage, relaxation of sex roles, equal pay for equal work, abortion on demand, and day care centers for working mothers.

Only 53% of the students completed Questionnaire 2, so that it is uncertain whether the results obtained from this group of students are representative of the total group of students in Wo St 1001. This problem occurred because of the suspiciousness of some of the 18 teaching assistants of outside evaluation of women's studies, a suspiciousness we later termed "cultural paranoia." Both the authors and the instructor sensed this resentment throughout the study, but it became explicit when nearly half of the teaching assistants ignored instructions to administer Questionnaire 2 in the last weekly small group meeting. By the time the authors received the completed questionnaires and realized what had happened, the course was over and it was too late to readminister the questionnaire.

It should be noted, however, that unlike the teaching assistants, the faculty and staff members from the Women's Studies program were highly cooperative and facilitated the study.

The results of questionnaire 2 were, ironically, highly favorable to the teaching assistants, with a large majority of students giving overwhelming approval to the teaching assistants' role in creating an atmosphere in the

small groups conducive to learning and personal growth, while they criticized the course lectures for an overemphasis on sociology.

Our conclusion from this study is to design future evaluations of social-political curricula to avoid arousing the sensitivities of the supporters. We suggest the following: (1) Try to have the front, visible person for your research someone likely to inspire confidence of the group to be evaluated: a Black for Afro-American studies, a woman for Women's studies, etc. (2) Consider all sources of input in designing the study; in particular, don't overlook students and teaching assistants. In the social-political curricula, students have often been instrumental in getting the new programs established, and if ignored, they may be resentful and uncooperative. Furthermore, some of the best ideas for evaluation may come from them. (3) Spend time on process as well as task. The central goal of the evaluation is to accomplish the task at hand: to design the study, to collect the data, analyze them, and draw conclusions. But particularly with the social-political curricula, failing to consider process may interfere with the task. By process, we mean, of course, the emotional atmosphere and feelings of individuals about the task. The strong-minded, committed individuals involved in the new curricula are likely to be emotionally involved in their programs. (4) Build a high response rate into the study. The rule applies to every evaluation study, but, given the multiple problems of evaluating one of the social-political curricula, it needs special emphasis for them.

## Educational Importance of the Study

One important aspect of the study described here is the data on student attitudes toward the role of women and student reaction to the first Women's Studies course at the University of Minnesota. Of wider importance is the examination of the special problems in evaluating what we have called the social-political curricula. We have hypothesized a special sensitivity of those involved in such programs, to which sensitivity we have applied Grier and Cobbs' term "cultural paranoia." It is important to take account of this natural attitude of group members who have had to struggle for the existence of their respective curricula. Researchers must design any evaluation studies to overcome the resistance to evaluation that "cultural paranoia" may cause.

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